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Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

January 6, 2003

TO: Authorized Representatives of Districts Eligible for Reading First Subgrants

FROM: Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

RE: Reading First Program

It gives me great pleasure to inform you that your district will be eligible to participate in a new program under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Reading First. As you know, I am a former librarian so reading and books are my passion! Last year, Montana secured a Reading Excellence grant that provided funding for 30 schools in our state to reform their reading programs in K-3. As with Reading Excellence, the focus for Reading First will be on grades K-3. These grants will be aligned to the Montana Reading Initiative that I launched in July 2001 at our first state Reading Summit in Billings. The Reading First program was authorized to carry out the following purposes:

- To provide assistance to state education agencies and local education agencies in establishing reading programs for students in kindergarten through grade 3 that are based on scientific reading research, to ensure that every student can read at grade level or above not later than the end of grade 3.
- To provide assistance to state education agencies and local education agencies in preparing teachers, including special education teachers, through professional development and other support, so the teachers can identify specific reading barriers facing their students and so the teachers have the tools to effectively help their students learn to read.
- To provide assistance to state education agencies and local education agencies in selecting or administering screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments.
- To provide assistance to state education agencies and local education agencies in selecting or developing effective instructional materials (including classroom-based materials to assist teachers in implementing the essential components of reading instruction), programs, learning systems, and strategies to implement methods that have been proven to prevent or remediate reading failure within a state.
- To strengthen coordination among schools, early literacy programs, and family literacy programs to improve reading achievement for all children.

At this time, our office is developing its state application for submission to the U.S. Department

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of Education. We anticipate that we will receive our federal award sometime in March. While your district is eligible, the application process will be competitive among the eligible districts. Workshops and technical assistance will be planned to assist school staff with the latest reading research that is at the heart of the Reading First program. The grant requirements, the application process and the criteria for selection of subgrants will also be included. We expect that we will conduct regional workshops during the month of April and make awards in late June. Successful districts will be required to send all K-3 staff from their eligible schools to a summer institute to be held during August. You may wish to visit the Reading Excellence page on our Web site at www.opi.state.mt.us to check reading resources that are posted there. A Reading First page will be established in the near future and all information about the Reading First program will be posted as progress and details become known.

Enclosed for your review is information that will provide you with an overview of the Reading First Program and address some basic questions that you might have. Debbie Hunsaker, our current Reading Excellence Program specialist, will be the primary contact for questions and will be coordinating grant activities. Debbie can be reached at dhunsaker@state.mt.us or by calling (406) 444-0733. We expect to contract with reading specialists to provide services that align with the CSPD regions.

Once again, I am pleased that the Office of Public Instruction will be participating in the Reading First Program. We look forward to your participation with us.

Enclosures